

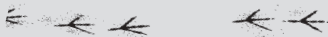


Greetings!

We are pleased to announce the release of the Final CCP/EIS for Nisqually NWR. The Plan is available at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and at the following libraries in Washington State: Timberland Community Library in Olympia; Tacoma Public Library; University of Washington's Suzallo Library in Seattle; William J. Reed Library in Shelton; and The Evergreen State College Library in Olympia. You may request a copy of the Summary of Changes and Appendix M (Comments and Responses) (110 pages) from the Refuge. The Final CCP/EIS is also available for viewing and downloading online at: <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning>.

What's Next?

A decision on the CCP will be made by the Service no sooner than 30 days after the notice of availability of the Final CCP/EIS is published in the Federal Register. The decision will be documented in a Record of Decision (ROD). A final planning update will announce the ROD. Implementation of the plan will then occur over the next 15 years.



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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

August 2004 - Planning Update #7



View of Nisqually River at Nisqually NWR, photo by Lorie Gillespie

The Final Environmental Impact Statement is Complete!

Over the past year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has responded to public comments and revised the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CCP/EIS). The Final CCP/EIS for Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge (NWR or Refuge) is now completed and available. Implementing the CCP would realize a new vision for the Refuge and enhance its critical role in the conservation and management of fish and wildlife resources of the Nisqually River delta and lower watershed. The CCP also provides for the continued development of high quality environmental education and wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for Refuge visitors.

Habitat Restoration

Proposed changes to the Refuge include the restoration of nearly 700 acres of historic estuarine habitat accomplished through removal of a large portion of the exterior Brown Farm Dike. The remaining 263-acre area within a newly constructed dike system would be managed to provide greatly improved freshwater wetland and riparian habitats. Thirty-eight acres of valuable forested surge plain habitat would be restored along the Nisqually River. Additional freshwater wetland and riparian restoration and protection would be possible with Refuge expansion.

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REFUGE PURPOSES

Nisqually NWR was established in 1974 for migratory birds and for the conservation and protection of fish and wildlife resources.



American wigeon, photo by Cristine Vadai

DID YOU KNOW NISQUALLY NWR . . .

- Protects most of the Nisqually River delta and includes one of the most extensive and productive estuaries in Puget Sound
- Supports 11 major habitat types, including a mosaic of estuarine, freshwater, and riparian wetlands, grasslands, and forested uplands
- Provides an internationally important feeding and resting area for migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway
- Supports over 10,000 migratory waterfowl during the fall and winter
- Provides regionally important migration and rearing habitat for salmon, particularly the federally threatened fall Chinook
- Supports over 300 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians including nesting bald eagles, a federally threatened species
- Was established in 1974 by a grass roots citizen movement
- Is the site of the signing of the first Indian treaty in Washington Terr.
- Provides quality experiences for over 130,000 visitors per year

Public Involvement Summary

The CCP Planning Team is grateful for the high level of interest in and support for Nisqually NWR and its CCP. A total of 1,717 comments were received on the Draft CCP/EIS, in letters, comment sheets, postcards, faxes, e-mails, telephone calls, and at public workshops during the 60-day public review and comment period. The comment period began in December 2002 when the Draft CCP/EIS was distributed. Thank you to all who participated. The Service carefully reviewed and considered all comments on the Draft CCP/EIS and incorporated many of these comments as changes to the document, which is now available as the Final CCP/EIS. In addition the Service prepared a Summary of Changes document that explains and summarizes all changes made between the Draft and Final CCP/EIS. Appendix M, in the Final CCP/EIS and Summary document, provides a synopsis of all comments received on the Draft CCP/EIS and detailed responses to these comments. The primary issues covered by your comments are outlined below.

Comments Received

Among those who commented on the alternatives, 136 out of 186 commentors (73%) expressed support, with and without qualifications, for Alternative D, the Preferred Alternative. Almost all commenting agencies, governments, and tribes, and organizations, sometimes representing large memberships, also expressed support for the Preferred Alternative.

There was almost unanimous support for Refuge expansion among the 1,263 people who commented on this issue. Only 8 people stated opposition to the expansion.

Waterfowl hunting on the refuge was opposed by 1,434 commentors. In contrast 41 commentors voiced support for allowing hunting to occur. An additional 9 people supported hunting

with qualifications. Forty-three commentors expressed their opposition to reducing the size of the Research Natural Area (RNA) to allow for hunting.

Of the 1,262 people who raised the issue of wildlife observation, most commented on the value of the refuge for this activity. Numerous people expressed support for enhancing the interpretation program. Many people also expressed the opinion that habitat preservation was more important than people's ability to observe wildlife. Among 138 people who raised the issue of hiking and trail use on the Refuge, slightly more people preferred maintaining the existing 5.5-mile dike trail than those who favored trail changes to accommodate restoration.

Approximately 193 people specifically commented on the issue of estuarine restoration and/or breaching the dikes. Slightly more people expressed support for breaching the dikes in favor of estuarine restoration while slightly fewer people specified their opposition to dike breaching.

Most of the 90 people who commented on the issue of environmental education (EE) at the Refuge noted the importance for continuing the EE program at the Refuge and some stated a preference for implementing a larger EE program.

A total of 54 commentors opposed allowing personal watercraft (PWC) use in the Refuge; no comments supported PWC use. An additional 33 letters addressed general issues related to boating. Of these, many expressed a desire to eliminate all motorized boating in Refuge waters. Others wrote in support of the 5 mph speed limit for boats.



Salmon,
illustration by
Ken Morris

How the Preferred Alternative Changed in the Final CCP

The Draft CCP/EIS presented an analysis of 4 Alternatives, Alternative D was selected as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft and Final CCP. Some text changes were made in the Final to correct, support, or clarify analysis and recommendations.

Issue	Actions Proposed under the Preferred Alternative in the Draft CCP	What Changed in the Final CCP
Refuge Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 3,479 acres to Refuge boundary including 512 acres of the East Bluff; 1,952 acres of freshwater wetland, riparian, and forested habitat; and 325 acres of the Nisqually River corridor south of I-5. 	Expansion acres remain the same. Some minor changes in the location of the expansion boundary were made on the East Bluff. Additional text was added to address access, Refuge parking, transportation patterns, and socioeconomics.
Habitat Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore 699 acres of historic estuary currently within the Brown Farm Dike. • Improve management of 263 acres of freshwater habitat with 5 new interior units; riparian plantings and 38 acres of riparian/surge plain restoration along the Nisqually River. 	No changes to the number of acres restored or the configuration. Additional text and a strategy were added to identify freshwater wetland restoration as a high priority in the expansion area south of I-5. A greater focus was placed on the management of non-native, invasive species including the addition of 3 management strategies for control and monitoring activities.
Environmental Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand program to serve 15,000 students. • Acquire or cooperatively manage Nisqually Reach Nature Center and Luhr Beach. • Replace Environmental Education Center. 	No changes to the Preferred Alternative.
Wildlife Observation, Hiking, Trail Configuration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce Dike Trail from 5.5-mile loop to a 3.5-mile round-trip trail. New trails include a 0.5 mile trail in surge plain forest; 2.5 miles on east side of Nisqually River; and potential East Bluff trail. 	No changes to the Preferred Alternative.
Waterfowl Hunting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open Refuge to waterfowl hunting on 191 acres creating a single block with State hunting area north of Brown Farm Dike. A total of 808 acres including State lands would be available for hunting 7 days per week during the waterfowl hunting season (Oct-Jan). 	No changes to the Preferred Alternative.
Research Natural Area (RNA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce existing RNA by 73 acres to provide a larger waterfowl hunt area, and square off one of the adjacent WDFW hunting tracts. Hunting is not allowed within the RNA. 	Seventy-three acres still removed from RNA to allow hunting, but 44 acres are proposed to be added to RNA at southeast end, resulting in a net loss of 29 acres rather than 73. An error in the RNA boundary in the Draft Plan was corrected.
Fishing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow boat fishing in all Refuge waters except in tidal restoration areas and RNA. • Eliminate existing McAllister Creek bank fishing due to dike removal. • Provide several new bank fishing opportunities including 2 accessible sites. 	No changes to the Preferred Alternative.
Boating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish 5 mph speed limit in all Refuge waters. • Close RNA to boating Oct 1-March 31 to provide wildlife sanctuary. • Construct Visitor Contact Station at Luhr Beach boat ramp under cooperative agreement with State. 	A specific strategy for monitoring watercraft use was added.

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Refuge Expansion

The proposal to expand the potential acquisition boundary of the Refuge by 3,479 acres would greatly improve the integrity of refuge habitats, complement restoration efforts, and provide additional wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities.

Visitor Opportunities

Under the Preferred Alternative the environmental education program would be improved and expanded to serve 15,000 students per year and the temporary environmental education center (old office trailer) would be replaced. Due to estuarine restoration and associated dike removal, the existing 5.5-mile wildlife observation loop trail would be reduced to a 3.5-mile round trip trail, and bank fishing on McAllister Creek would no longer be offered. A new 2.5-mile trail would be developed on Tribal and Refuge properties east of the

Nisqually River with bankfishing access and a primitive 0.5-mile trail in surge plain habitat. Other new trails and fishing opportunities could be provided south of I-5 in the future if appropriate lands were acquired. A seasonal, 7 days-per-week, waterfowl hunting program would be opened on 191 acres of Refuge lands. A speed limit of 5 miles-per-hour would be established for all watercraft in Refuge waters.

For More Information

Questions or concerns regarding the Final CCP/EIS may be directed to: Jean Takekawa, Refuge Manager phone (360) 753-9467 or fax (360) 534-9302.



Environmental education class at Twin Barns overlook, photo by Art Pavey



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Address correction requested